

INTOXICATION ASSOCIATED WITH “SUICIDE BY COP”

Christopher P. Holstege¹, John J. Flood², James P. Walsh³, Laura K. Bechtel¹, Gregory B. Saathoff⁴

1. Division of Medical Toxicology, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, United States

2. Crisis Negotiation Unit, Critical Incident Response Group, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Quantico, VA, United States

3. Research Strategies Network, Charlottesville, VA, United States

4. Critical Incident Analysis Group, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, United States



INTRODUCTION

>“Suicide by Cop” (SBC) is a colloquialism for a form of victim-precipitated homicide in which a suicidal individual (subject) engages in calculated, life-threatening and criminal behavior in order to compel police to use deadly force.

>As a phenomenon, SBC falls within the arena of *victim precipitated homicide* where the decedent somehow contributes to his / her death at the hands of another. The authors prefer the updated and neutral *subject precipitated homicide* to the term *victim precipitated* because the word *victim* is specific and should be reserved for those who are truly victims, not those who play a significant role in their own demise.

>A number of studies have examined the frequency and dynamics of these incidents.

•The first scientific study of SBC was completed by Hutson et al. The researchers examined all shooting cases (n = 437) handled by the LA County Sheriff's Department between 1987 and 1997, and determined that 13% of all fatal officer-involved shootings (OIS) and 11% of all OIS, fatal and nonfatal, were SBC.

•Kennedy et al. reported their findings that same year in a review of 240 police shootings cases culled from 22 newspapers in an electronic library search between 1980 and 1995. The data, while not rigorously collected and subject to numerous reporting biases and other significant data collection problems, provided some initial evidence that suicidal motivation (although not specifically SBC) might occur at a rate of 16–46% of police shooting cases.

•Homant et al. examined another 123 completed or averted SBC cases that had been drawn from 10 separate sources. They found that 56% of the incidents posed a serious threat to police or bystanders. Fifty percent of the time the subject confronted the police with a loaded firearm.

•Homant and Kennedy conducted a follow-up to their earlier 2000 study. This study also introduced a typology of SBC cases: (i) Direct Confrontations, in which suicidal subjects initiated attacks on police; (ii) Disturbed Interventions, where potentially suicidal subjects took advantage of police intervention to attempt a SBC; and (iii) Criminal Interventions, in which subjects facing arrest preferred death to submission. Thirty percent of the cases were found to be Direct Confrontations, 57% Disturbed Interventions, and 12% Criminal Interventions. Examining their findings from another perspective, only 30% of the events were preplanned, while the majority, nearly 70%, represented SBC events that spontaneously emerged during the police intervention situation.

•Mohandie et al. examined the frequency and characteristics of SBC among a large nonrandom sample of North American officer-involved shootings (OIS). Thirty-six percent of the OIS in this sample were SBC, with SBC cases more likely to result in the death or injury of the subjects than regular OIS cases. Most SBC cases were spontaneous. Findings confirm the trend detected in earlier research that there was a growing incidence of SBC among OIS. SBC individuals had a high likelihood of possessing a weapon (80%), which was a firearm 60% of the time. Half of those with a firearm discharged it at the police during the encounter.

>No data has been published pertaining to the use of drugs by the perpetrator in a SBC incident.

>We hypothesized that the majority of the subjects were intoxicated at the time of the SBC event.

Methods

>A retrospective review was performed of all SBC cases entered into Federal Bureau of Investigation's Law Enforcement Online Hostage Barricade Database System.

>Demographic data collected included the following:

- Subject age
- Subject sex
- Duration of the event
- Subject's previous substance abuse history
- Subject's use of inebriating substances during the event



RESULTS

>From 1983 to 2009, a total of 54 SBC cases were documented.

>1 (1.9%) age under 18, 8 (14.8%) ages 18-29, 28 (51.9%) ages 30-45, 12 (22.2%) ages 46-65, 1 (1.9%) age over 65, and 4 (7.4%) the age was not documented

>49 (90.7%) were male and 5 (9.3%) female.

>The incident durations were: 18 (33.3%) lasting 0-2 hrs, 16 (29.6%) 2-4 hrs, 7 (13%) 4-6 hrs, 7 (13%) 6-9 hrs, and 6 (11.2%) greater than 9 hrs.

>A total of 46 subjects (85.2%) were killed, 7 (13%) injured, and 1 (1.9%) no injury.

>There were no deaths of law enforcement or bystanders.

>Of the subjects with a documented previous substance abuse history (n=37), the subject's previous abuse was: ethanol 67.5%, Schedule I Controlled Substance 51.3%, prescription 8.1%.

>Substances inebriating the subject during the event included: ethanol (52.5%), Schedule I Controlled Substance (29.7%), prescription drugs (5.4%), and no reported substances (13.5%).

CONCLUSIONS

>Of the SBC subjects with documented results, 86.5% were intoxicated with mind-altering substances.

>The majority of SBC cases (85.2%) were killed.

>Law enforcement agents should be aware that when managing SBC cases, the majority of subjects are intoxicated, further complicating negotiations.

>Through disinhibition, intoxication can increase the potential for violent threats or behavior leading ultimately to tactical resolution and loss of life.

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